**DANIEL CHAPTER 3**

This morning we’ll be looking at a very familiar story; in fact, it is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. You probably first heard it when you were a child. It’s the story of the three Hebrew children and the fiery furnace. In Chapter 1 we were introduced to Daniel and saw that he was a man of principle. He did what he knew was right without compromising with the world and all it had to offer. In the first part of Chapter 2 we saw that Daniel was a man of prayer. When life-threatening trials came he didn’t panic. He sought the Lord’s face and God protected Daniel and used him. In the last half of Chapter 2 we are introduced to Daniel the prophet who was able to tell King Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation.

In Chapter 3, which takes place about 2 years after Chapter 2 we have the narrative of the fiery furnace. Even though Daniel is not mentioned in this chapter, we can definitely see his influence. It is interesting how God teaches and molds us. When we read and study the Bible we learn how we are to live in a manner that pleases God. But in addition, God places individuals in our lives. These people mentor, encourage, inspire and model for us what righteous living looks like. You can probably think of some of the people who have had an impact in your life spiritually. There is no doubt that Daniel influenced the development of the faith and courage of his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.

So, let’s get into the word…

READ Daniel 3:1-3. I find it more than a coincidence that King Nebuchadnezzar, after having a dream about a great image, that he has a great image constructed. Perhaps one of his advisers, inspired by the king’s dream, suggested it. Maybe it came out of Nebuchadnezzar’s own mind. Whatever the case, the king, being very powerful, wealthy and possessing a great ego, has this great image constructed. It’s made entirely of gold, unlike the image in his dream, which just had a head of gold.

After the image is built the king sends for all men in leadership positions in the Babylonian Empire to come to its dedication. Here we see that they all arrive, perhaps thousands of important men, and stand in front of this great golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar set up.

READ Daniel 3:4-7.

[Question 1] So, instead of assembling for a formal dedication of his statue, the king’s real purpose is revealed. This gathering is more like a worship service. The people are commanded to worship the king’s image. This amounts to worshiping the king himself. This is idolatry.

[Question 2] We can hardly call this real worship. True worship cannot be forced. It is spontaneous and comes from the heart. Being the all-powerful ruler of most of the civilized world, Nebuchadnezzar opted to use threat tactics to force everyone to bow down to him. Genuine honor and respect is earned. It’s not ordered. Some tyrants are so eager for the praises of their people that they force it out of them. They settle for whatever they can get even if it is hollow and fake. As the music plays, thousands bow down to the image. But not everyone goes along with this pathetic display.

READ Daniel 3:8-12.

[Question 3] The sole aim of these Chaldean snitches is to make themselves look good to the king at the expense of others. Did you notice the irony here? These Chaldeans owed their lives to Daniel for what he did back in Ch 2 when he interpreted the king’s dream. His actions spared their lives. Now 2 years later they seem to have forgotten what he did. Instead they turn on his friends and rat them out for their own personal gain.

READ Daniel 3:13-18

[Question 4] There is no evidence from this passage that our three heroes struggled with their decision not to bow to the image. Now, I’m not saying it was an easy thing to do. They were fully aware of the consequences. But they had the courage and conviction and they stood up for it – no matter what.

I believe that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are fully prepared to walk into that blazing furnace. They are willing to die for their faith in the one true God.

[Question 5] Do you realize that today more than 200 million Christians face persecution all around the world? Did you know that an average of over 300 people per day are martyred for their faith in Christ? These people fall into the “but if not” group. The ultimate test that God will put any of us to is our willingness to sacrifice everything for Him – our lives, our families, our jobs, and our possessions.

Jesus told the multitudes that followed Him, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). I hope that God never puts me to that test, but if He does I would like to think that I would pass it. But there is no way for any of us to know until the time comes. For Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that time had come.

READ Daniel 3:19-23.

[Question 6] The men who escorted them to the mouth of the furnace are themselves killed by the intense heat.

READ Daniel 3:24-25. The king is startled. He rubs his eyes and looks again. His soldiers had just thrown three men bound into the furnace but now he can see four men walking around! I want to skip ahead to Q8…

[Question 8] The king thinks it is one of the Babylonian deities. He says “the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” Jewish tradition says that this was an angel sent by God to protect Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Others say it was an optical illusion. The king was only seeing things. Christian tradition holds that this was a pre-incarnate appearance by Jesus Christ Himself. Not a son of the gods, but rather THE SON OF GOD. Though we don’t know for sure, I tend to go along with that view.

READ Daniel 3:26. The three men exit and everybody gathers around and examines them.

READ Daniel 3:27.

[Question 7] There’s no reasonable or natural explanation for what has just taken place! It’s obvious to everyone that only God could have performed such a miracle.

I want to save Question 9 for last.

READ Daniel 3:28. The astonished king is at a loss for words. When he finally does speak up, he…

[Question 10] He praises God and gives Him the glory. Then he praises Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego for their faithfulness to God. Only a short time earlier Nebuchadnezzar had been furious with them for NOT bowing before his image. Now, in a twist of irony, he COMMENDS them for not bowing.

[Question 11] No. It is one thing to acknowledge God and even praise and worship Him. It is quite another to commit your life to Him. As you will see when we get to Chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar continues his pagan beliefs.

READ Daniel 3:29. The chapter closes with the king rewards the three men with a promotion. READ Daniel 3:30. The End (our three heroes are never mentioned again). You could say that they went out in a blaze of glory – but they didn’t!

OK so let’s go back to Question 9…

[Question 9] Eventually we all face trials. But we don’t have to go thru them alone. Keep your faith and your focus on God. Let Him work the miracle that He feels your life needs. Trust His sovereign grace & goodness!